

Free mentoring programme for small businesses from BT and Digital Boost

BT has launched a new mentoring programme to support small businesses in Edinburgh during the pandemic, in partnership with Digital Boost, a free non-profit platform which unites digital experts with leaders of small businesses.

BT has pledged to deliver free one-to-one coaching sessions to at least 1,000 small businesses and is encouraging small firms across Scotland to register their interest. The initiative is part of its Small Business Support Scheme, which launched last Summer.

The mentoring initiative is open to all BT employees and has been successfully trialled with a number of small businesses prior to launch. BT has enlisted the expertise of its colleagues across the business – including Senior Executives – to upskill small business on a range of topics, including Cyber Security, Marketing, Social Media, Strategy, and more. Digital Boost will connect individuals from small businesses with relevant BT experts via its free online platform, where small businesses are able to register their interest in booking a free virtual mentoring session.

BT launched its Small Business Support scheme last Summer – a broad range of measures to help small businesses get better positioned for growth during and beyond the pandemic. The scheme aims to do this by boosting the connectivity, cashflow and confidence that many small businesses say they lack as a result of the ongoing public health crisis.

The new mentoring programme forms a key part of BT's efforts to drive skills and optimism amongst small firms, with an earlier survey conducted by BT and Small Business Britain revealing that more than half lack confidence in the future of their business. 63 per cent of small firms felt they needed more support in marketing and sales; 44 per cent wanted more assistance with digital skills; while 36 per cent lacked skills in building business resilience. BT is responding to these concerns by opening up access to free, expert advice to 1,000 small firms initially, with a view to further expanding the reach of the programme over the coming months.

Alan Lees, BT director for corporate and public sector in Scotland, said: "Helping small businesses to acquire new skills and boost their confidence during these exceptionally challenging times is a central part of BT's Small Business Support Scheme. We've already equipped a further 20,000 small businesses with digital skills since the launch of the scheme and now we're going even further by introducing a free mentoring programme. By partnering with Digital Boost we can engage our own colleagues around the need to step up and support small businesses, with experts around the businesses volunteering their time as BT mentors.

"Our ambition is to scale this very quickly, involving colleagues from all levels, including the senior leadership team. I would encourage any small businesses in Scotland who feel they would benefit from this direct support to book a spot as soon as possible via the website."

Sherry Coutu, Founder at Digital Boost, said: "At Digital

Boost, we help those who work for and lead small businesses and charities to survive the Covid-19 crisis and be more competitive in the long-run. BT is a key partner in our effort to help prepare the UK to build back better after the pandemic.”

Brett O’Brien, Internal Engagement Manager at BT, who has been involved in the pilot of the mentoring scheme, providing his support in sales to a small business, said: “I volunteered to be a Digital Boost mentor as I felt it was my duty to support the small businesses that are trying to weather the storm of Covid-19. I have lots of friends and family working in small businesses that are no longer in work so I felt personally motivated to support the small businesses that are fighting for survival. My expertise are in sales/partnerships and I have conducted two mentor sessions. The feedback from them was great and I feel a great sense of pride knowing that I’m making a direct impact to help these SMEs stay in business.”

BT has already helped tens of thousands of small businesses acquire new digital skills through its Skills for Tomorrow programme which aims to reach 1 million small business owners and their employees by 2025. In recent months, BT has launched new learning content on crucial topics – such as how to protect yourself from cyber-attacks and using social media to reach new customers. In the last year alone, BT has delivered over 190 free learning webinars for small businesses.

Small businesses interested in mentoring support can book a free one-to-one coaching session now by visiting: <https://www.digitalboost.org.uk/>

BT is also acutely aware that it’s an extremely worrying and uncertain time for small businesses and is also providing access

to expertise to small business leaders around maintaining wellbeing by boosting their mental and physical health. A free

online [Wellbeing Toolkit](#) is already available and a webinar series specifically designed for small businesses will launch next month.



Alan Lees BT director for Corporate and Public Sector in Scotland